

TOWN OF WINDHAM

JEAN de SMET
FIRST SELECTMAN



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March 15th, 2009

Government Administration and Elections Committee
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT

Gentlepeople:

Please protect the independence of the Council on Environmental Quality.

The CEQ is an important citizens' advocate to protect our environment. They are the only group with authority where citizens can turn when questions are raised about the actions of state agencies. SB 839 would merge the CEQ into the Department of Environmental Protection. While that may appear to be logical, the DEP is the agency that the CEQ often watches. SB 839 would create the proverbial "fox watching the hen house."

Governor Rell's budget merges or disempowers a number of watchdog groups, including Health and Children's advocates. Any savings found by eliminating checks and balances is short sighted. We will pay a greater price in the near future.

In fact, I advocate creating a citizens' watchdog for state funded construction projects. As the federal stimulus package money begins to flow, we need to prevent the repeat of faulty construction seen at UConn and on highways. Construction workers know about the problems early in the project, but they need a watchdog group to turn to.

Sincerely,

Jean de Smet
First Selectwoman